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ACTION WHA-00

INFO LOG-00 AID-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 SRPP-00 UTED-00 VC-00
H-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 L-00 VCE-00 AC-01 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 OMB-01 PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00 ACE-00 P-00
SP-00 SS-00 TEST-00 TRSE-00 T-00 USIE-00 PMB-00
DRL-02 G-00 SAS-00 /005W
-----CF60D3 240234Z /30

R 222141Z JUL 02
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6850
INFO NSC WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

UNCLAS CARACAS 002128

USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
NSC FOR SALCEDO, AMB. MAISTO

E.O. 12958: NA
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, VE
SUBJECT: POLITICAL UPDATE: JULY 22, 2002

1. SUMMARY

AT A PRESS CONFERENCE TODAY, FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS PUBLICLY
STATED THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT CHAVEZ
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REGARDING THE VICE-PRESIDENCY OR ANY OTHER OFFER ON A
GOVERNMENTAL POSITION. AS FOR THE PRESENCE OF USAID'S OFFICE OF
TRANSITION INITIATIVES (OTI), "SIETE DIAS" MAGAZINE JULY 21 ISSUE
HAD AN ARTICLE DISCUSSING THE PROS AND CONS OF SUCH DIPLOMATIC
ACTION. WITH RESPECT TO THE PROPOSED REFERENDUM, THE ELECTORAL
NATIONAL COUNCIL (CNE) IS CURRENTLY WORKING TO PROVIDE THE
REGULATIONS NECESSARY TO CALL SUCH VOTING. END SUMMARY.

ARIAS CARDENAS REJECTS BEING OFFERED THE VICE PRESIDENCY

2. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE ON JULY 22, FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS
STATED THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT CHAVEZ

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REGARDING THE VICE-PRESIDENCY OR ANY OTHER OFFER ON A POSITION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. THIS STATEMENT HAS PUT TO REST ANY RUMORS CIRCULATING ABOUT ARIAS BEING OFFERED THE VICE-PRESIDENCY AS A SOLUTION TO THE POLITICAL CRISIS. ARIAS ALSO RECOGNIZED MEETING WITH CHAVEZ POST APRIL 11 TO REFLECT ON WHAT HAD HAPPENED. ARIAS ASSURES THAT HIS POLITICAL PARTY UNION RESIDES WITH THE OPPOSITION ALONG WITH THE DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE (DC).

MIXED VIEWS ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF USAID OTI OFFICE IN CARACAS

3. AN ARTICLE IN THE JULY 21 ISSUE "SIETE DIAS" MAGAZINE CITES POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES (OTI). FORMER MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS RAMON ESCOVAR SALOM, STATED THAT OTI'S PRESENCE IS A NEW DIPLOMATIC STYLE THAT SIGNIFIES THE SUPPORT FOR

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DIALOGUE IN VENEZUELA. LAWYER ASDRUBAL AGUIAR EXPLAINS THAT THE PRESENCE OF OTI FOLLOWS THE TERMS OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION AND SHOULD NOT CAUSE ANY CONCERN. HOWEVER, INTERNATIONAL EXPERT EIRA RAMOS VIEWS OTI AS A UNILATERAL MISSION UNLIKE THE OAS AND BELIEVES THERE IS NO NEED FOR IT SINCE VENEZUELA HAS NOT BEEN UNDER ANY TRANSITION PERIOD SINCE APRIL 11.

NOTE: POST WOULD HAVE APPRECIATED A HEADS UP THAT AID'S OTI SPOKE ON THE RECORD TO THE VENEZUELAN PRESS ABOUT FUTURE ACTIVITIES IN VENEZUELA.

REFERENDUMS MATTERS

4. THE ELECTORAL NATIONAL COUNCIL (CNE) REPORTED THAT IT WOULD PROVIDE THE REGULATIONS TO CALL THE VOTING, WHICH REQUIRES THE COLLECTION OF 20 PERCENT OF VOTER'S SIGNATURES REGISTERED IN THE RESPECTIVE DISTRICT. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CNE, SIGNATURES COLLECTED BEFORE AUGUST 3 WOULD NOT BE VALID, AND ONLY THOSE COLLECTED AFTER THE FIRST HALF OF THE MANDATE WOULD BE APPLICABLE. CNE STATED THAT IT COULD NOT RUN A REFERENDUM FURTHER, UNTIL ITS BUDGET IS APPROVED. MEANWHILE, THE ELECTION OF THE NEW CNE IS STILL PENDING, WAITING FOR THE LAW ON ELECTORAL POWER TO BE PASSED.

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